

## Dona Nelson

May 12 - August 12, 2018

### *Stand Alone Paintings*

(selected works, 1983 - 2018)

Curated by Ian Berry, Dayton Director, Tang Museum at Skidmore College

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Thomas Erben Gallery is pleased to share word of Dona Nelson's *Stand Alone Paintings* at the Tang Museum at Skidmore College. Curated by Ian Berry, Tang Museum Dayton Director, the exhibition is a comprehensive survey of Nelson's influential and varied body of work, comprised of over thirty large paintings made between 1983 and 2018. Bringing together for the first time Nelson's more recent and celebrated abstract paintings with four of her early representational works, *Stand Alone Paintings* unites a period of tremendous development, illuminating the creativity and reflection at the heart of Nelson's art.

*Stand Alone Paintings* explores several bodies of work by Nelson: the ongoing two-sided paintings series; her large charcoal, pencil, and ink rubbings from 2002; her "mother's paintings" from 1999-2000; and the 1997 series, *The Stations of the Subway*, among others. *Stand Alone Paintings* demonstrates numerous connections that link Nelson's various works. "Mother's paintings," a series of four paintings that play off a small artwork made by Nelson's mother, Opal Marie Cook, a so-called Sunday painter, are juxtaposed with three paintings from the 1997 *Stations of the Subway* series, which riff off Nelson's experience of walking in New York City and looking at paintings in New York art galleries. Individually and collectively, the two series underscore Nelson's process of making paintings out of the experience of viewing paintings.

Alongside these paintings, hung on the wall, *Stand Alone Paintings* speaks to the animated presence of nine two-sided paintings, which are displayed on steel stands and wood structures. In these works, paint penetrates the canvas through gestures and processes, with each of the worked-on sides of the painting generating and impacting the other. Nelson's flexible methods of display initiate a subtle dialogue with the gallery space. As seen in her two-sided works and her charcoal, pencil, and ink rubbings from 2002, made by stretching canvas over rough collaged paintings, the idea of using the surface of one work to generate another is one of Nelson's most vital and fertile innovations.

Taken together, *Stand Alone Paintings* charts Nelson's prominent role in shaping the direction of abstract painting in New York, forging an independent vocabulary that melds painting with sculpture, representation with abstraction, and acrylic and oil paint with untraditional materials, such as cheesecloth and modeling paste.

*Dona Nelson: Stand Alone Paintings* is presented by the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College. The exhibition is curated by Tang Museum Dayton Director Ian Berry. A reference catalogue will accompany the exhibition, chronicling the history of Nelson's work through images, historical essays, and new scholarship.

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Born in Grand Island, Nebraska, **Dona Nelson** moved to New York City in 1967 to participate in the newly formed Whitney Independent Study Program. Nelson's abstract paintings have been featured in numerous solo exhibitions, including a large

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survey show at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro in 2000. Her early figurative works were the subjects of a solo show at the Morris Gallery at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia in 1999. Nelson's work has been featured at a dozen galleries in New York City and has been included in numerous group exhibitions nationally and internationally, including the 2014 Whitney Biennial. Her work is held in major institutional collections, such as Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Guggenheim, New York; Kadist Foundation; Metropolitan Museum; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Perez Art Museum, Miami; and Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University. This is the first major solo museum survey for Nelson in nearly two decades.

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